

WHAT ABOUT CANADIAN LINENS?

INTERVIEWS WITH MEN WHO ARE POSTED—A CHAPTER FROM THE HISTORY OF THE ENTERPRISE IN THE UNITED STATES.

THE article on this subject in our last issue has attracted a good deal of attention, and THE REVIEW has heard a number of different views as to the possibility of linens being made in Canada. The opinions of Mr. R. R. Stevenson, of Stevenson, Blackader & Co., and of Mr. Donald Fraser are worth noting, as both these gentlemen are well informed on this subject.

Mr. Stevenson does not think it would be possible to make fine linens with a profit, although coarse towelings, hollandes, etc., might be made profitably in small quantities. In the province of Quebec, large numbers of farmers grow, prepare and weave flax in small quantities, to be used in making aprons, overalls, etc., for local use. "I think," said Mr. Stevenson, "that the process of preparing the flax for weaving fine linens is so unpleasant and difficult that it would be impossible to get women to do the work, and, in any case, the demand for fine linens in this country is not large enough to make the industry pay." In this connection it may be mentioned that the Montreal Cotton Co., through Messrs. Stevenson, Blackader & Co., their selling agents, made representations to the Government to have linen yarn, when imported by cotton manufacturers for use in their factories, placed upon the free list. If this were done, Mr. Stevenson is of the opinion that all linens required to supply the Canadian market might be made from imported yarn.

Mr. Donald Fraser, who has had over 40 years experience in the linen trade of Canada, thought there would be more profit in raising flax for export than in manufacturing linen here. Cottons, Mr. Fraser stated, are to a great extent taking the place of linens in many lines, and very little fine linen is sold in this country, though there is a small demand for the coarser grades. With reference to cultivating flax for export, Mr. Fraser mentioned, as an example, Messrs. Dunbar, McMaster & Co., of Gilford, Ireland, who import thousands of tons of flax annually from Russia. They would purchase all their flax in Canada if the right quality could be obtained. This firm is only one of a number of Irish concerns which import all the flax used in their mills.

In a recent issue of The London Foreign and Colonial Importer it was stated a company had been formed in England for the purpose of offering a stimulus to farmers in Great Britain to grow flax on a large scale. Of late years many improvements have been made in the appliances used for preparing the flax and it is hoped that many by-products, which have hitherto been wasted, will now be utilized and the industry will thus be made more profitable. If this scheme proves successful the farmer may find that there is more money for him in flax than in wheat.

THE EXPERIENCE IN THE UNITED STATES.

Now that Congress is proposing high duties on imported linens the prospect of reviving the industry there is being discussed both by American and British papers. In England the opinion is that if duties sufficiently high were imposed by Congress an industry that would menace British trade would grow up. Last year Britain exported 150,867,000 yards of plain unbleached and bleached linens, and of this quantity the United States took 100,470,000 yards. So that to be deprived of the American market would be a serious matter to the British producer. The British manufacturer has now to import his raw material largely, since the growing of flax at home has declined. This is because, along with other branches of farming, unrestricted foreign competition has made it less profitable to grow flax.

Shortly after 1850 the making of linen began in New England, and continued for some years with marked success. Two causes

chiefly operated to hurt the enterprise. The duty was lowered, and the improvement in the making of cottons restricted the use of linen fabrics, a great many lines of cotton taking their place. But the Massachusetts mill continued to exist for years. Then Congress, unwisely, put a duty on the flax, for the ostensible purpose of encouraging the home grower. This it may have done, but it seems also to have contributed to the crushing out of the manufacture of linens. The mills were restricted in their purchases of raw material. They tried American-grown flax for a time, and the farmers tried to grow what was wanted, i.e. a long fibre flax to be used in making the finer grades of linen. However, and this is a point which Mr. Munn and other merchants who are interested in the question may notice, the American farmers failed to supply the qualities required. They furnished short-fibred flax made from plants that were mowed down like wheat instead of being pulled up by the roots and handled in the old-fashioned way. As long as the best flax could be got the New England concern did well. Everything in the linen line was woven and the goods gave satisfaction. Under a lower tariff, unsuitable home-grown flax, and the competition of cottons, the profits in the enterprise began to disappear, and the linen mills were transformed into cotton mills. Now that southern competition is keen, the policy of making linens, under the new tariff, is being discussed in New England and something may come of it, although higher duties on flax may again stand in the way.

BAD FIRE AT HALIFAX.

At 9.15 o'clock on Saturday night, May 22, a cloud of smoke burst from the upper windows of Clayton's clothing establishment on Barrington street, Halifax. At 10.15 o'clock the big retail building and factory were a sizzling mass of ruins, with only the walls standing. The wholesale section of the building was saved by the fireproof walls between it and the retail and manufacturing building. Half a hundred people were in the store making purchases when others rushed in from the street to tell them that the place above was in flames. The crowd made a panicky rush for the exits, and the principals and clerks had time to secure very little of value before they were forced by the rapidly spreading fire to abandon the store. The firm's bicycle department, on the lower floor, facing Barrington street, contained \$5,000 to \$7,000 worth of bicycles, nearly all of which were saved. The retail building, on the three upper floors of which was located the manufactory, was completely wrecked, and the loss of building, stock and machinery is roughly estimated at from \$90,000 to \$100,000. The entire building was worth \$35,000, on which there was \$18,000 insurance. The wholesale and retail stocks and machinery were of an aggregate value of \$150,000, insurance on which amounts to \$75,000. Machinery to the value of \$15,000 is lost. From 200 to 300 women and girls were employed in the clothing factory and an army of clerks in the retail store, while hundreds of women worked outside the building for the firm, which is one of the largest clothing concerns in Canada. Trinity church, McDonald & Co.'s large foundry and other buildings close by were saved with much difficulty. Several firemen were injured, but none seriously.

WHY HE AGITATED.

An eccentric old member of the British Parliament has tried in vain for fifty years to get a bill passed preventing window cleaners from standing outside the windows. "I introduced it," he said, "not for the sake of the window cleaners, but for the sake of the people below, on whom they might fall. The idea was suggested to me by the fear that a window cleaner might fall on myself."